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Hey Dad

to be honest it's irrelevant how this all began, plus I know eventually you'll hear what the other seven had to say so I'm going to spare you the details and get straight down to it.

The bus was in flames and none of us knew why that had to happen. As we walked away into the desert we all of us became more solitary, that I can tell you, so the story from here on in is my own personal version of events.

Mr. Fredericksen walked at the back of the pack whilst Craig walked way out ahead. If anything I'd say he was excited, like this whole thing was some kind of big adventure. Not so for everyone else - Elizabeth, in particular, was on the edge of tears. I walked alongside her, reached out and gave her

hand a squeeze, told her to keep drinking the water we'd been given.

We were still walking much later when the half covered sun sat low on the horizon, everyone was tired and Josie shouted out "how much longer?"

"Not too long" replied Mr. Fredericksen. Then stopping for a moment he asked a question in return, "Josie, what do you do when you're in trouble?" She said something about asking her friends or parents for help.

"and what would you say if I told you we have friends?"

There was a silence as we all stood around unsure of what to make of it. It was Josie who broke the silence again, "can we trust them?" She asked.

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Mr. Fredericksen smiled, "these are no ordinary friends" he said.

We walked on for another 40 minutes or so before arriving at a dusty clearing surrounded by rocks, "we're here" said Mr. Fredericksen. Truthfully none of us could make sense of what we were seeing, the day had been getting stranger by degrees since we left school that morning and this moment was turning out to be another shift of the stick. Our ride back to town was a burnt wreck somewhere behind us in the desert and now, after all that walking, our destination appeared to be a black wooden cube. There was a door on the side facing us and no windows that I could see, it was obvious this building had been constructed for us.



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Mr. Fredericksen told us to go inside. I was somehow at the front of the pack and so it was me who was leading the rest of them... to what?

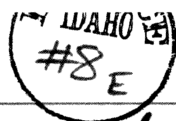
I remembered what you told me Dad about threatening situations: knees and elbows ready, the hardest parts of the body. It occurred to me, as we stepped inside the cube, that it might be up to me to seize the initiative if we needed to get away.

I noticed that the box was built out of plywood on what looked like a bolted steel frame, very simple. If we got locked inside I was pretty sure we could kick our way out.

A bench ran along all four inside walls of the cube, eight new bottles

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of water were arranged around the bench, each one labelled with our names. I remember the strong scent of freshly sawn wood and the creak of the door from where the hinges hadn't been aligned exactly with the frame.

I heard Mr. Frederickson behind somewhere instructing us to sit down next to our new bottles. I saw my name scrawled on a bottle straight ahead and I could see that the condensation on the surface of the glass had been disturbed, the way you get fingerprints on bottles of soda. I touched my bottle and the water was chilled, like it had come straight from the icebox.

My head wasn't running straight. I was skipping beats and a weird cold feeling was literally running



through my veins.

An odd hush fell over the group, Craig and I glanced at each other and I could tell that we were thinking the same way.

Fredericksen stood at the door, a dim silhouette against the blue black sky. "We have been contacted by friends," he said, "but friends who are not like any we've had before; they have reached out to us and you have been selected to reach back."

I was beginning to feel very strange. My limbs were numb and I felt a little sick in my stomach.

Fredericksen entered the box to join us inside, he shut the door behind him and the box fell into complete blinding darkness. I can't be sure

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(ID) IDAHO (S)
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but I think I heard a sound outside in the far distance, a vehicle of some kind.

Whatever was supposed to happen though, I guessed, then, that the moment had come.

I'm not sure when it happened or how, but I dreamt that my eyes and ears had been replaced with machines. I had fallen into a world constructed in just such a way that a single whisper spoken by the right voice would echo a billion times and reach every mechanised ear, whilst a single carefully placed image would reflect and replicate across endless space to fill every mechanised eye. I lost myself in that place, forgot that the dream was a dream, wasted

lifetimes struck dumb by monsters
in a fearful deathly charade.

I woke up sitting at a table
across from a stranger. I wondered
how long I had been asleep and
where the rest of the group had
disappeared to. I had no memory
of their departure or of this man's
arrival, no memory of anything
leading from the darkness to this
moment what so ever.

The man noticed that I was awake.
He asked me "Did you dream?" I
replied that I had. We stared at
one another for a moment, then
he asked me something strange.

He asked "how do you build a
reality which doesn't collapse
within three days?" I sat and
thought about the question for

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quite some time. I can't tell you how long, or where it was my thoughts took me.

Then I heard my own voice speaking, I was asking a question. "We are here aren't we?" I said, "haven't we always been here?"

His answer was immediate. "Have we? Maybe to someone like you with no memory, what so ever, every instant feels utterly concrete, but is it?"

At that point he picked up one of the empty bottles that was lying around and held it out to me, "take the bottle from my hand" he said. I reached out and the bottle wasn't there, I could see it but it wasn't there. I stopped trying.

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"Try again" he said, I hesitated but then reached out my hand and there it was, cold and firm to the touch. The instant my hand touched the glass, the four outer walls of the cube fell away revealing the desert landscape rolling out to the far horizon. In the distance was a tower of smoke, surely from the smoldering remains of the Magic Valley school bus.

"Is this world the same one I remember?" I asked him.

"The question implies the existence of a correct answer" he replied
"Can you be sure there is one?"

"Isn't there?" I asked, "Surely a world is either real or not real?"

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The man smiled, "perhaps instead we choose to be real whatever suits someone best, in a practical way."

We began to sink then, away from the world.

"Maybe the monsters are those things that attempt to bind us to one idea"

The sky became a square of light within a world of concrete and steel. Inscribed upon the concrete was a recurring piece of writing which read L.D.D RESEARCH GROUP, the name was familiar.

"and maybe the angels are whatever amounts to zero". A loud noise and a flash of light

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above me drew my attention away.
The square of sky was replaced
by a flashing red light.

The man was gone, I was alone
and I knew that I would never
see you again.

"How do you build a reality that
doesn't collapse within three days?"
I asked myself and immediately
I felt foolish - when you think
about it both the question and
answer are obvious.

And so now I don't know where I
am, think about that. Actually the
phrase is inadequate, you could
never say it twice for the same
circumstance and yet I'm here
stuck with it.

How can I help ease your mind

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without lying? I can say words to you, I can say "Hey diddly doohey my goodly hand dog and the Batman Chapel of the Down; there in time with the ticking clock, we could eat beans for most the rest of our lives..." but it wouldn't make a difference.

I realize that none of this is going to make sense to you, but that's because all of your questions are front loaded with answers that I cannot give without lying.

I can honestly say I wish you were here with me Dad, experiencing this.

And next you'll ask if it's real, which is the wrong question. I know it sounds like I don't know what I'm talking about.

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I don't know if I want to know
what I'm talking about. I want
to stop talking but I can't. My
friend Manfred was autistic and
stopped talking - remember? Maybe
he'd understand? I don't know.
Maybe Jesus knows... or Elvis...

Here beyond the bright black
edge of nowhere the old ideas
are irrelevant. Here we're
anonymans...

Goodbye Dad,
Stevie.

